

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

An Evaluation of Higher Education Requirements
for the Texas Department of Public Safety
Entry Level Applicants

A Policy Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Professional Designation
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by

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ABSTRACT

The research in this paper will examine, evaluate, and explore the reasons to maintain, improve, or support higher education for law enforcement officers. The paper addresses the benefits that are recognized by the police agency that requires a college education for entry-level employment for police officers. In addition, the paper examines the benefits that the police officer receives as a result of obtaining a college education. The paper also examines the benefits received by the community that is policed by an educated police officer. The paper address questions of the opportunity, availability, and funding of a college education. The paper also addresses concerns of possible discriminatory effects on the recruitment of minority police officers. The paper makes recommendations for the implementation of an education policy for police agencies that implement a college education requirement.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy research project is to examine and evaluate the benefits, suggest policy, furnish guidance, and outline common practices derived from the requirement of higher education for police officers. In addition, this research paper will address the results of the requirement of a college education for entry level recruits applicants. The subject of a college educated police officer is a serious one, and continues to be an area of concern for police administrators, agencies, and the citizenry. Today's police officer faces a world of "high-tech" advancement and increasing social demands on police agencies, to meet these challenges a higher education may be required.

This paper will address the issue of employee recruitment, retention, community satisfaction, and complaint reduction. This paper is intended to benefit the Texas Department of Public Safety, Personnel Bureau to assist in identifying and recruiting qualified applicants. However, the results of the research may be of interest to other city, county, and state law enforcement agencies in determining for or against implementing college educational requirements .

The information for the foundation of this paper came from state statutes, as well as reliable sources such as recognized criminal justice academic journals, periodicals, and reference texts.

The purpose of this paper will be to demonstrate the benefits that can be recognized from the recruitment and retention of qualified, professional applicants through the requirement of a higher education.

HISTORICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

Although the idea of college-educated police officers was first introduced by August Vollmer in the early 1900's, it has only been during the last twenty-five years that police administrators, college professors, and criminal justice experts have strongly debated the necessity of requiring police officers to possess a college education (Miller & Fry, 1976; Sherman, 1978; Carter, Sapp, & Stephens, 1989; Carter & Sapp, 1991). One historical example of innovative educational requirements for police officers was the Wichita, Kansas Police Department's program under law enforcement pioneer O. W. Wilson. During the 1930s, Wichita required in-service officers to pursue a two-year educational program at the municipal university. The curriculum was 100 % police job-related, including subjects such as police management, forensic science, personal identification and interrogation. Although primarily taught by police specialists, all courses were fully accredited by the university. As a result, many officers went on to earn bachelor's and more advanced degrees (Molden, 1996). Upgrading police personnel by raising the educational levels of police officers has been, and remains, both an integral element of police professionalism (Fogelson, 1977) and part of the conventional wisdom of police administrators. According to the American Police Association only about 20% of American police officers hold a four-year college degree, while many states require only a high school diploma or its equivalent for the entry-level employment of police officers (Mahan, 1991). Bureau of Justice statistics for 1993 show that only 1 % of municipal police departments with 100 or more officers, 1 % of sheriff's departments, and 4 % of state police agencies require a four-year degree. Presidential commissions, academicians, and police executives have maintained that higher education is essential for anyone charged with such a complex and important task (Worden, 1990). The movement to educate

police gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, with the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) and the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973) both recommending the 4-year degree as a prerequisite for employment in law enforcement. In its report, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice expressed the belief that a college education would provide substantive knowledge and interpersonal skills that would significantly enhance an officer's ability to provide high quality, as well as equitable and efficient, service to the public. The Commission based these recommendations on the current complexity of police tasks and the need for officers to make increasingly critical decisions. One of the primary byproducts of the Commission's recommendations was the creation of the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP). The LEEP program is pointed to as one of the explanations for the increased level of police officer education in the past several decades. To illustrate, in 1970, 14.6 % of American police officers had completed 2 or more years of college. A 1988 national survey, commissioned by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), found that 44.7 % of American police officers had completed 2 or more years of higher education, a 30 % increase nationally (Carter & Sapp, 1992). However, a 1979 National Advisory Commission on Higher Education for Police Officers was extremely critical of a number of college and university programs designed to educate officers, finding many of these to be of very low quality and lacking real educational value.

Progressive agencies of the 1960s and 1970s tried to impose a four-year edge requirement for entry level recruit officers but were unsuccessful due to the job relatedness issue emanating from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Act makes it a violation to "fail or refuse to hire,

or to discharge any individual...because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin". Some agencies were accused of systematically excluding applicants by imposing educational and other requirements that tended to disqualify women and minorities at a higher rate than white males (Molden 1996). This issue was addressed in Davis vs. Dallas, the United States Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit held that the Dallas Police Department's requirement of 45 semester hours of college with a "C" average was a job-related requirement in light of the unique responsibilities of the police and the public responsibility of law enforcement.

Under current state statute in Texas an entry level applicant must be twenty-one years of age and possess a high school diploma or its equivalent for a license as a police officer. However, an applicant may be licensed at twenty years old if he has completed sixty semester hours of college (Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education, Minimum Licensing Requirements 1996). The Texas Department of Public Safety requires that an applicant for an entry-level law enforcement position possess sixty semester hours of college, or two years active duty service in the United States Armed Forces, or two years prior experience as a licensed police officer (Texas Department of Public Safety, General Manual 1997).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE OR PRACTICE

The debate on the value of higher education for police officers continues to be one of the more persistent and pervasive issues in policing (Carter & Sapp, 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Carter, Sapp, & Stephens, 1988, 1989; Goldstein, 1977; Worden 1990). Independent research in the area of higher education for police officers tends to focus on organizational improvement through human

development. Some of the presumed advantages of sending police officers to college and of accepting college graduates at the entrance level are:

1. an enhanced understanding of police functions and the police role;
2. an increased knowledge of the importance of police in society;
3. an improved sensitivity for the problems of people;
4. a better ability to communicate;
5. the development of skills;
6. an improved capability for exercising discretion;
7. the refinement of analytical qualities;
8. the consideration of moral and ethical implications of police work; and
9. the development of personal values that are consistent with police organizational goals and objectives in a democracy (Sterling, 1974).

Other advocates of a higher education requirement for police officers have noted that college education improves mandatory skills such as communication (written and oral), critical thinking, decision making, and better understanding of human relations (Sherman, 1978; Worden, 1990; Carter & Sapp, 1990). Several studies have reported a positive relationship between education and "job performance" (Barry, 1978; Cascio, 1977; Cascio & Real, 1976; Cohen & Chaiken, 1972; Finnegan, 1976; Fisher, 1981; Hayeslip, 1989; Murrell, 1982; Sanderson, 1977; Saunders, 1970; Smith & Ostrom, 1974; Sterling, 1974; Trojanowicz & Nicholson, 1976). Higher performance ratings from supervisors was noted by Finnegan (1976). Sanderson's (1977) research found college education to have a positive effect on academy performance and career advancement. Cohen and Chaiken (1972) and Sanderson (1977) found a positive relationship between educational levels and officer promotions. College educated police officers were found to have better peer relationships than non-college educated police officers (Madell & Washburn, 1978; Weirman, 1978). College educated police officers were also found to be more likely to take on a leadership role in the organization (Cohen & Chaiken, 1972; Trojanowicz & Nicholson,

1976; Weirman, 1978). Other studies found that college educated officers were less authoritarian and dogmatic (Dalley, 1975) and tended to be more flexible (Trojanowicz & Nicholson, 1976). Studies by Cohen and Chaiken (1972), Cascio (1977), and Sanderson (1977) found that college educated police officers take fewer leave days, receive fewer injuries, have less injury time, have lower rates of absenteeism, use fewer sick days and are involved in fewer traffic accidents than non-college educated officers. An innovative approach to the performance of responsibilities (Trojanowicz and Nicholson, 1976) and a less rigid attitude about policing (Dalley, 1975; Roberg, 1978) are attributes of the college educated police officer.

Officer-citizen interactions have also been the subject of various research projects. Research in this area identifies a positive relationship between higher education and fewer citizen complaints, fewer disciplinary actions against officers, and fewer allegations of excessive force (Cascio, 1977; Cascio & Chaiken, 1972; Sanderson, 1977). College educated officers were found to communicate and respond to the needs of the public in a competent manner, with civility and humanity (Carter & Sapp, 1988, 1989, 1990b). In a 1989 study (Carter, Sapp, & Stephens) 98 % of the responding police agencies indicated that officers with two or more years of college education received fewer citizen complaints than their counterparts with less education. Further, 96 % of the responding police agencies indicated that officers with two or more years of college education had fewer disciplinary actions (Carter, Sapp, & Stephens, 1989). In addition, college educated officers appear to be more amenable (or less hostile) to restrictions imposed by the courts (Smith, 1978; Smith & Ostrom, 1974; Weiner, 1974).

Higher education for police officers has been cited as an advantage and even a cure-all since at least 1917 (Goldstein, 1977). However, opponents of the college education requirement have voiced concern over issues such as possible discriminatory effect on minorities, limitations on applicant pools, and the possibilities that college educated officers would be more troublesome because they expect to be promoted quicker and are quick to criticize management (Hudzik, 1978; Sherman, 1978; Carter, et. al, 1989; Cater & Sapp, 1991). Another early concern of opponents to the college degree was that college educated officers would become dissatisfied and restless too soon, leaving policing long before retirement (Sherman, 1978). In addition to these concerns, researchers have studied the effect of education and job satisfaction. Several studies have suggested that there is a correlation between education and job satisfaction in police work (Buzawa, 1984; Halsted, 1985; Burke & Deszca, 1987, 1988; Martelli et. al , 1989; Regoil et. al, 1989). Further research in the area of higher education related job satisfaction to turnover rate (Gannon, 1979; Landy, 1989). Sheley and Nock (1979) observed that, "While job satisfaction is an important element in job performance and turnover rate within any occupation, it seems especially crucial in police work". Lefkowitz (1974) found that level of education was related not only to job satisfaction, but also to attitude. He found that college educated police officers were less satisfied with work itself, promotional opportunities, supervision, and coworkers. Worden (1990) in a study of citizen satisfaction with police officer performance noted a difference between degreed and non-degreed officers. His study found citizens slightly less satisfied with officer courtesy for officers who held a college degree. Worden indicated that the differences were small and not statistically significant.

Current practices and policies in Texas cover a vast array of entry-level educational requirements. As mentioned earlier, the Texas Department of Public Safety requires sixty semester hours of college, or two years active duty in the military, or two years experience as a licensed police officer. However, the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife requires either a four-year degree or sixty semester hours of college with two years of job-related experience (Texas Parks & Wildlife, Operations Manual, 1995). While other state agencies such as the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission have no college education requirement, Texas' two largest municipal police departments both require college education, but establish different minimums (TCLEOSE Summary 1995). The Houston Police Department requires sixty semester hours of college with a "C" average, while the Dallas Police Department requires forty-five semester hours of college with a "C" average (TCLEOSE Summary 1995). Other agencies educational requirements vary from a high school diploma, City of Irving Police Department, to a four-year degree, City of Arlington Police Department (TCLEOSE Summary 1995).

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

As previously stated, the continued professional development of police personnel and the overall improvement of the police organization continue to be an important issue. The now-defunct Law Enforcement Education Program was an ambitious effort in this endeavor. The Law Enforcement Education Program made available educational grants and loans that allowed police personnel to pursue a college education. The program was notable for its size and scope.

Although the Law Enforcement Education Program is no longer in existence there continues to be a growing number of college educated individuals entering policing (Carter et. al, 1989, 1990,

1991; Worden, 1990). A recent survey of municipal, county, and state law enforcement agencies by the Police Executive research Forum reveals that more than half of the responding departments offer educational pay incentives and/or tuition assistance programs; all but a small fraction have policies that are intended to facilitate higher education for officers (Carter et. al, 1989).

Moreover, although formal requirements for entry or promotion do not normally include a college degree, informal practices often impose a de facto college requirement (Carter et. al, 1989).

There appears to be sufficient empirical evidence to support an assertion that a college education improves the quality of policing. A college education provides both tangible and non-tangible benefits. Police officers gain new skills and knowledge, while improving critical thinking (Carter & Sapp, 1990) and expanding their experiences dealing with diverse racial and cultural groups. The police agency benefits from a better educated police officer who has improved written and oral communication skills as well as a better understanding of human relations (Sherman, 1978; Worden, 1990). The community likewise benefits, as evidenced in research showing improved job performance (Barry, 1978; Cascio, 1977; Cascio & Real, 1976) and a less rigid attitude towards policing (Dalley, 1975; Roberg, 1978). The educated police officer benefits from improved academy performance and enhanced career advancement (Sanderson, 1977). Better peer relationships are also an added benefit (Sanderson, 1977).

In the midst of these benefits one must consider the constraints encountered by requiring a college education. Many agencies offer "education pay" based on the number of college semester hours completed or degree achieved. Other agencies offer tuition reimbursement for officers enrolled in college courses. This can create a hardship for smaller agencies that can not afford to offer the

added monetary incentives. Many opponents of the requirement of a college education for entry-level officers cite its potentially discriminatory effect on minorities. A study in 1988 by The Police Executive Research Forum found that minority representation in American law enforcement agencies does tend to approximate the general population, and virtually matches that of white officers.

Education Levels by Race/Ethnicity

	Average Level of Education	No College	Some Under - Graduate Work	Graduate Degree
Black	13.6 years	28%	63%	9%
Hispanic	13.3 years	27%	68%	5%
White	13.7 years	34%	62%	4%
Other	13.8 years	19%	73%	8%

Although the Law Enforcement Education Program is no longer in existence, the goal of college education is still attainable for most police officers. There are numerous community and junior colleges, as well as four year colleges and universities making attendance convenient. Most institutions offer loans, scholarships, and grants to assist officers in their goal. There are some police support organizations, such as The 100 Club of Houston, that offer payment of tuition and expenses for police officers of member agencies.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this policy research project is to examine and evaluate the benefits that are achieved by the requirement of a college education for entry-level police officers. It is intended to provide guidance and suggest policy in this regards to the Texas Department of Public Safety.

The police profession has been called the “unprofessional profession” (Carter et. al, 1988), in order to remove this undesirable description the profession must improve itself. In order to accomplish this goal, and meet the challenges of a fast paced and ever-changing society the police officer must “wear many hats”. The community expects police officers to be versed in all aspects of criminal law, procedure and investigative techniques, while acting as a community organizer, school liaison, and counselor. In order to handle any of these varied roles would require a high level of education and training. To handle them all requires education, training, and professionalism.

It is concluded, based on the available research that the requirement of a college education for an entry-level police officer is a desirable and attainable goal. In this endeavor, an educational policy for the concerned should be developed. College degree requirements for promotions should be established as well as for entry-level officers. As the role of the police agency changes due to community requirements the need for more highly educated and versatile officers.

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